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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

LADY HERBERT'S GARDEN

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Name:	LADY HERBERT'S GARDEN
District:	Coventry (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.411380 Longitude: -1.5081538 National Grid Reference: SP 33553 79378 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001449 Date first listed: 03-Feb-2000

Details

A public garden designed between 1930 and 1938 by Albert Herbert, with finely detailed structural elements, incorporating C20 almshouses and the remains of the medieval city wall.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Lady Herbert's Garden was created in two principal phases, the first, the east garden, in 1930-1, followed by the west garden in 1935-8. Sir Alfred Herbert (1866-1957), one of Coventry's leading industrialists and founder of Alfred Herbert Ltd, manufacturers of machine tools, began to acquire property to the north of the centre of Coventry in June 1930 in order to create a public 'garden of flowers' (correspondence, 1930) and 'a haven of peace and floral beauty' (Alfred Herbert News) which would commemorate his second wife, Florence, who had died in May 1930. The property purchased by Sir Alfred included a former rope factory and other industrial premises. The former rope walk survived at the southern end of the site, running parallel and to the east of a section of C14 city wall. The repair and preservation of this section of wall and two adjoining medieval gates formed an integral part of Sir Alfred's concept for the garden (Warwicks Gdn Trust J 1999). In mid 1930 the Leicester architect Albert Herbert, Sir Alfred's cousin, was appointed as designer for the garden. Albert Herbert FRIBA (1875-c1964) had already worked extensively for Alfred Herbert Ltd, designing offices, factories, and warehouses in Europe and the Far East. Herbert's plans for the garden survive (LRO), and show its evolution from the initial scheme drawn in mid 1930, to the design which was implemented and opened to the public on 12 April 1931. In 1935 Sir Alfred began to acquire land to the west of the city wall to expand the memorial garden and construct almshouses. Slum properties were purchased and cleared in five phases between 1935 and 1937, while in 1937-8 a theatre, the Coventry Hippodrome, which stood at the southern end of the west garden was demolished. As part of the development of the west garden a new road, Chantry Place, with vernacular-style houses attributed to Albert Herbert (Coventry City Council 1998), was constructed on the western boundary of the garden. The garden was completed in 1938 with a rockery, stream, and pools at the south-west corner of the site. During the Coventry Blitz in April 1941, Lady Herbert's Garden suffered a direct hit which destroyed a short section of the city wall and a flight of stone steps; these were rebuilt in a modified form. The garden was described by Country Life in 1944, and in a series of articles by Sir Alfred which were published in his company magazine, Alfred Herbert News. Lady Herbert's Garden was supervised from 1930 to 1947 by Miss Denison, who acted as garden administrator and horticulturalist; she was succeeded by Miss Hoffa, who retired in 1956. Sir Alfred provided an endowment for the garden, but following his death in 1957 the trustees experienced

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increasing financial difficulties. In 1974 responsibility for Lady Herbert's Garden was transferred to Coventry City Council. Today (1999) Lady Herbert's Garden remains in public ownership, while the Lady Herbert's Homes which lie within the site here registered are administered by a charitable trust.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Lady Herbert's Garden is situated c 0.25km north of the centre of the city of Coventry, to the north of Hales Street and north-west of Priory Gate. The c 0.6ha garden is bounded to the north (Cook Street), west (Chantry Place), south (Hales Street), and south-east (Priory Gate) by public roads. The north, west, and south boundaries of the garden are marked by sandstone walls c 1.5m high with stepped, ornamental coping, which were designed by Albert Herbert. The southern boundary wall at the junction of Chantry Place and Hales Street sweeps in an elegant curve to join the south-west corner of the medieval Swanswell Gate. This wall, together with those flanking the principal entrance east of Swanswell Gate, the Cook Street entrance to the north, and adjacent to the Lady Herbert's Homes on Chantry Place are surmounted by finely detailed ornamental bronze railings designed by Albert Herbert (plans, LRO). The railings comprise a horizontal rail of diamond cross-section supported by stylised gothic buttresses which incorporate the initials 'FH' for Florence Herbert, and which are surmounted by stylised acorn finials. The eastern boundary is today (1999) formed by a metal fence which separates Lady Herbert's Garden from the Garden of International Friendship designed by Dominic Scott which is in the course of construction (1999-2000) as part of the City Council's Phoenix Initiative. This garden replaces domestic properties which were demolished c 1970 when the ring road to the east was constructed. Early C20 photographs show that the eastern boundary was then marked by a boarded fence.

Lady Herbert's Garden slopes gently from its southern boundary adjacent to Hales Street and Priory Gate, to a level area adjacent to the northern boundary formed by Cook Street. There is a more pronounced slope at the south-west corner of the site which is the result of the raked plan of the Coventry Hippodrome which occupied this site until 1937-8. There are significant southerly views, particularly from the east garden, towards the spires of St Michael's church (the old cathedral) and Holy Trinity church; the C19 facade of the Old Fire Station c 30m south of the site in Hales Street is also significant in outward views from the west garden. Visually, the latter is contained to the west by early C20 vernacular-style houses designed by Albert Herbert on the west of Chantry Place. These formed part of the redevelopment of the area in the mid 1930s and, together with their hedged front gardens, form the setting of Lady Herbert's Garden and the Lady Herbert's Homes. The site is adjoined to the south-east by the medieval Swanswell Gate, and to the north by Cook Street Gate. A length of C14 city wall (scheduled ancient monument) runs from north to south through the garden linking these gates.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Lady Herbert's Garden is approached from Priory Gate to the south-east, at a point immediately north-east of Swanswell Gate. Concave sandstone wing walls with ornamental coping surmounted by bronze rails flank piers of square plan surmounted by stepped square caps, which support a pair of bronze gates (all designed by Albert Herbert). The western wing wall bears a bronze plaque inscribed 'Lady Herbert's Garden', while the gates have acanthus finials and panels of foliated ornament which incorporate Florence Herbert's initials. Immediately within the gates the flagged walk of York stone is laid in a diamond pattern. This walk extends north into the east garden, and is terminated c 130m to the north by a gateway which gives access to the garden from Cook Street. Concave sandstone wing walls flank piers of similar design to those at the principal entrance, which support late C20 wrought-iron gates which replace the original bronze gates which were stolen c 1970. Bronze railings surmounting the wing walls have also been stolen (1999), but the bronze plaque on the west wing wall survives, as do the original bronze gateposts with acanthus finials. A further entrance leads to the garden from Chantry Place at a point c 45m south of its junction with Cook Street. Tall square-section sandstone piers with stepped square caps support a single bronze gate which has a level top rail, alternate straight and twisted vertical rails, and ornamental guard rails. The gateway is flanked by further bronze railings. Some 30m north of this entrance, a further, similar gateway closed by a single bronze gate of similar design, gives access to the Lady Herbert's Homes from Chantry Place. This gateway is also flanked by bronze rails which extend north for c 30m, surmounting the curved north-west boundary wall, to Cook Street Gate.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The Lady Herbert's Homes, a group of almshouses designed by Albert Herbert, are integral to Lady Herbert's Garden. Arranged in two ranges running from east to west, the single-storey cottage-style houses are built in brick with

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sandstone details, tall brick chimneys, and hipped slate roofs. The north range comprising six dwellings was built in 1935, while the south range, also comprising six dwellings, followed in 1937 when Sir Alfred obtained the freehold of the Chantry Tavern. The cottages adjoin the medieval city wall to the east, and the north and south ranges are separated by a narrow courtyard which is laid out with a central flagged walk and small formal flower beds adjacent to the cottages. Bronze gates to the north-west and south-west of the cottages formerly allowed access from the courtyard to Lady Herbert's Garden.

GARDENS Lady Herbert's Garden is divided into two unequal areas by the C14 city wall which runs from north-west to south through the site. The larger, western garden is divided into two unequal sections by the Lady Herbert's Homes which stand towards the north-west of the site. The east and west gardens are linked at two points: some 10m north-west of the principal entrance a flagged walk passes through a Tudor-gothic arch (designed by Albert Herbert c 1937); and c 65m north of the entrance a double flight of stone steps separated by a flagged landing ascends through the course of the medieval wall to a slightly curved flagged walk, flanked by herbaceous borders, which leads west to the Chantry Place gate. The present steps, flanked by low sections of wall planted as rockeries, were built c 1941 to replace steps built in 1936 which were destroyed by a bomb in April 1941. The original steps were flanked by higher sections of wall which were also destroyed by the bomb.

The long, narrow east garden is enclosed to the west by the medieval city wall, against which shrubs and climbing plants grow in a wide bed. A straight walk extends north for c 130m through the east garden, rising gradually to the north with irregularly spaced flights of stone steps. The walk is constructed from carefully detailed York stone flags, and is flanked to the east by areas of lawn. Ornamental shrubs are planted along the eastern boundary of the garden, extending west at several points, particularly adjacent to the flights of steps, to create compartments. The southern 70m of the axial walk was developed by Albert Herbert in 1930 from the rope walk which survived on the site from its earlier industrial use (OS 1914). Some 85m north of the entrance, the medieval wall curves north-west to approach Cook Street Gate, while the axial walk continues on a straight course, leaving a triangular lawn to its west. At the northern end of this lawn a geometrically paved terrace with a bowed side to the south supports an octagonal shelter. Designed in 1930 by Albert Herbert (plan, LRO), the shelter comprises four semicircular brick recesses (formerly containing timber bench seats, absent 1999) separated by brick piers which support oak beams and cornices above which rises the ogival tiled roof. The domed inner surface of the roof bears a gilt-painted inscription, 'In Spring the garden bids its hope; In Summer all is at its best; In Autumn still some joy remains; In Winter gardens take their rest', originally on a grey background, but today (1999) on white. The shelter, and the Cook Street Gate to the north-west, provide focal points in the northern section of the garden, while the flagged terrace on which the shelter stands allows views south through the garden to the Coventry spires, which are echoed by vertical conifers planted near the city wall. The lawn is enclosed to the north by flowering cherries underplanted with herbaceous subjects and shrubs. To the north-west the medieval wall is reduced to its foundations, which are planted as a rock garden, and with low-growing roses (CL 1944). Stone steps descend to a lawn encircled by a walk paved with rectangular flags set in random stones, and enclosed to the north, west, and south by ornamental trees and shrubs; to the south-east there is a small rockery. Cook Street Gate to the north, and the north facade of the Lady Herbert's Homes to the south, provide further enclosure. The north-west garden formed part of Albert Herbert's original scheme of 1930-1.

To the south of the Lady Herbert's Homes the larger area of the west garden is divided into three unequal areas of lawn by two east to west walks, while a perimeter walk encircles the whole area. These walks are again surfaced with rectangular flags set at regular intervals among crazy paving; changes in level are accommodated by stone steps in the perimeter walk. The upper lawn is enclosed to the north by the almshouses, and to the south by a herbaceous border, one of a pair which flanks the upper walk leading from the east garden to Chantry Place. Below this walk a gently sloping south-facing lawn descends c 10m to the second east to west walk; there are areas of rockery to the south, south-east, and south-west of this lawn. Some 15m south of the almshouses, and at the upper end of this lawn stands a low Portland stone bird bath installed in 1950. Presented to Sir Alfred by the Coventry Engineering Society, this was designed by Albert Herbert in the form of a shallow circular basin supported by four carved frogs set on an octagonal stone base. The third and lowest lawn, on the site of the Coventry Hippodrome, slopes more steeply towards the southern boundary of the site. Large rock gardens which adjoin the perimeter walk c 45m south-east and south-west of the almshouses project into this lawn. Above the rock gardens the lawn is open and planted with specimen trees, while below it is enclosed by trees and shrubs creating a glade with a vista north across the upper lawns to the south facade

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of the almshouses from a curved stone bench seat. Designed by Albert Herbert and presented to Sir Alfred by his employees in 1956, the seat stands near the southern boundary c 85m south of the almshouses. This seat was modified and repaired in 1992 (Warwicks Gdn Trust J 1999), and is backed by evergreen shrubs and trees. To the north of the seat, and on the slope to the north-west, a series of nine concrete tanks concealed by rockwork and ornamental planting including Japanese maples and bamboo are arranged at different levels to form a watercourse (dry, 1999). The watercourse and rockwork in the southern section of the west garden were constructed by the Coventry firm W H Jones and Son in 1938, following a design by a Mr Osbourne (plan, LRO). The rockwork in Lady Herbert's Garden has been linked on stylistic grounds to that carried out at the same period for Percy Cane at the War Memorial Park, Coventry (Coventry City Council 1998). The western perimeter walk is bordered to the west by mature Lombardy poplars and evergreen shrubs, and ascends three flights of stone steps to regain the level of the upper lawns.

In the late C20 the structure and much of the planting of Lady Herbert's Garden closely reflects the scheme designed and implemented by Albert Herbert between 1930 and 1938, which is recorded on contemporary photographs and described in articles by Sir Alfred Herbert (Alfred Herbert News 1940s) and in *Country Life* (1944).

REFERENCES

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Maps Albert Herbert, Lady Herbert's Garden, Coventry, c 1938 (DE4816), (Leicester Record Office)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 3rd edition published 1914 1935 edition

Archival items Albert Herbert, Plans for Lady Herbert's Garden, including details of paving, shelter and other features, 1930-56 (DE4816), (Leicester Record Office) Alfred Herbert News, 1930-56 (Coventry Record Office) Sir Alfred Herbert, correspondence with City authorities, 1930 (Coventry Record Office) Photographs of Lady Herbert's Garden, 1930- c1950 (private collection) Photograph, east garden under construction, 1930 (in McGrory 1991) Photographs of Lady Herbert's Garden, c 1940 (in CL 1944) Coventry City Council Municipal Records, 1974 (Coventry Record Office)

Description written: December 1999 Amended: January 2000 Register Inspector: JML Edited: July 2004

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.